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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: social integration

Statement by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Meeting the human need for water as a means to social integration

1. Social integration/inclusion is a dynamic with multifaceted dimensions ranging from capacity to meet basic human needs to addressing complex cultural, religious, language and educational barriers. Since the inception of the Organization, the Member States have set in writing, from the Charter of the United Nations onwards, the call to respect the rights and dignity of every individual human being. At the completion of the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 promises were made in the principles and goals to "... give the highest priority in national, regional and international policies and actions to the promotion of social progress, justice and the betterment of the human condition based on full participation by all. To this end, we will create a framework for action to: (a) Place people at the centre of development and direct our economies to meet human needs more effectively". See *Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.II.A.7).

2. In his address to the General Assembly on 23 September 2009, President Obama made the following statement, "Now is the time for all of us to take our share of responsibility for a global response to global challenges ... if we are honest with ourselves we are not living up to our responsibility ... I say this not to sow fear, but to state a fact: the magnitude of our challenges has yet to be met by the measure of our actions".

3. Persons who lack access to safe water and sanitation remain excluded from the most elementary opportunities for social integration and inclusion. It is well documented that people, living where water is not provided and protected by local, regional or national policies, women and children especially, spend their days walking to gather sufficient water for the family. They are denied, due to this investment of time and energy, the right to attend school and maintain employment, and often suffer from preventable water-borne diseases. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that worldwide 884 million people live without safe drinking water, which is one person in eight. It is predicted that this number will rise, however, due to the effects of climate change. In addition, another 2.5 billion people live without sanitation; 85 per cent to 90 per cent of diarrhoeal diseases are preventable with safe drinking water and hand washing with soap. In a world which has sent people to the moon, developed smart cars and robotic surgery, it is unconscionable to allow this situation to continue.

4. Due in some measure to commitments Member States made to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and the Monterrey Consensus, there has been some progress in the provision of water. Increased official development assistance (ODA), trade for development, investments and debt relief have assisted developing countries to use their monies in improving their own infrastructure. However, with the onset of the fuel, food and financial crisis leaving countries scrambling to stabilize their own financial systems, the focus has shifted from international commitments to national interests. The interface of social, financial and sustainable development issues is well recognized. Models designed to promote sustained cooperation and collaboration among the various stakeholders should be forthcoming at local, regional, national and international levels. The

United Nations should provide a single forum for dialogue on issues of common concern, with the goal of moving towards regular and substantive sessions.

5. Professor Jeffrey Sachs, in his keynote address to the Second Committee of the General Assembly on 12 October 2009, gave credit to the many successful working models that have been developed to assist in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. He was both positive and hopeful that it is possible to make the goal of halving those living in extreme poverty by 2015 because of these tried and proven methodologies. The missing components have been political will and financing.

6. We recommend that having basic human needs satisfied, specifically the provision of safe drinking water and sanitation, will promote social integration and inclusion. Governments, such as Panama, Ethiopia, Uganda, Gambia, South Africa and Uruguay, which have incorporated the right to water in their constitutions, are to be commended. For some it has been an ongoing struggle to provide for the implementation of this right. It was heartening to learn of Denmark's recent gift of $94 million to Uganda over the next five years in order to assist that country in keeping up its efforts to provide water and sanitation for its citizens.

7. We take heart that several United Nations meetings have named partnerships as being essential in order to redress the inequalities that divide our world. Structural adjustment programmes, international cooperation and partnerships (see Copenhagen Commitments 8 and 10) are a means to relieve the misery of almost one-third of our sisters and brothers living in extreme poverty.

8. Some models of effective partnerships for the provision of water and sanitation include:

(a) WaterAid whose vision is "a world where everyone has access to safe water and sanitation. This mission is to transform lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities. WaterAid partners with and influences decision makers to maximize an effective impact". WaterAid equips women, children and marginalized groups to petition Governments to build, maintain and repair their local water supplies. Successful projects are located in Asia, Africa and the Pacific region. In Ghana, WaterAid has signed a formal agreement with 11 district assemblies setting out responsibilities for planning and implementing water and sanitation plans. WaterAid will provide technical and financial assistance to local governments; another partner non-governmental organization (NGO) will support the preparation and implementation of the water and sanitation plans; and local governments will provide oversight and leadership in the planning and delivery of the services. The district assemblies believe the agreement will enable them to carry out their legal responsibility of developing water and sanitation services for their communities (www.wateraid.org);

(b) ProNet introduced community-led total sanitation to the Accra region of Ghana, an area where people were underinformed about the importance of hygiene and sanitation. ProNet entered the community on an informal basis to instruct people on appropriate hygiene and sanitation practices in an easy to understand manner. Literacy education was culturally and language sensitive and appropriate to the people of the community. Latrines were constructed by the people themselves. According to the local population, the latrines have helped keep flies away; fewer diseases occur; and less contamination seeps into bodies of water;

(c) WomenAid International is another development partner whose work is to provide people with drinking water pipes, irrigation networks and water reservoirs (www.womenaid.org);

(d) The Millennium Villages project involves village people using simple solutions to develop their communities, including water projects (www.millenniumvillages.org).

Policy recommendations for Governments:

- Place people at the centre of development by inviting them to be equal partners at the decision-making table and through every step of the process.
- Promote ongoing reform of the unfair conditionalities imposed on developing countries by the international financial institutions.
- Choose well-established, credible partners with whom to collaborate in efforts to provide water and sanitation for all.
- Specify clear limits on private ownership and control of water resources. All public/private partnerships in the delivery of water and sanitation must be monitored to ensure that they have a built-in pro-poor component.
- Member States must allocate domestic resources and finances for the provision, management, maintenance, and sustainability of water and sanitation systems.

Note: Statement endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Franciscans International and Congregations of St. Joseph; by non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregations of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, International Federation on Ageing, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, Salesian Missions, Sisters of Charity Federation, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, UNANIMA International; non-governmental organizations with special roster status: Loretto Community.